

## HOUSE RESOLUTION 275

By Gilmore

A RESOLUTION to recognize and commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Nashville Sit-In Movement.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that members of this General Assembly should honor and commemorate those key events in our history that have advanced the ongoing struggle for civil and human rights and promoted racial equality in our State; and

WHEREAS, the Nashville Sit-In Movement is certainly one such historical campaign, which occurred from February 13 through May 10, 1960 as part of a non-violent, direct action campaign to end racial segregation at lunch counters in downtown Nashville; and

WHEREAS, prior to the Nashville Sit-In Movement, Jim Crowism pervaded all aspects of life in Nashville and throughout the South with a pattern of racial exclusiveness prevailing in Nashville's schools and public facilities, including restrooms, waiting areas, snack counters, transportation terminals, libraries, theaters, hotels, restaurants, and neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, under the leadership of Reverend Kelly Miller Smith and Reverend James Lawson, local black leaders united in 1958 to establish the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference (NCLC), an affiliate of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to promote civil rights for African-Americans through nonviolent civil disobedience; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Lawson, who had studied the principles of nonviolent resistance while working as a missionary in India, conducted workshops for NCLC members on nonviolent tactics against segregation in the First Colored Baptist Church's basement throughout the year, preparing the young activists to fundamentally change the social order of the day; and

WHEREAS, after several small tests, on February 13, 1960, religious leaders and college students from Fisk University, Tennessee A&I (later Tennessee State University), and

American Baptist Theological Seminary launched their first full-scale sit-in and, with their philosophy of quiet strength, began to challenge the institutionalized policy of segregation by attempting to desegregate Nashville's lunch counters; and

WHEREAS, over the course of the campaign, sit-ins were staged at numerous stores in Nashville's central business district, including Woolworth's, S.H. Kress, Walgreen's drugstore, McClellan's, and Grant's variety store; and

WHEREAS, the demonstrators' principles of direct, nonviolent protest and written rules of conduct became models for later protests throughout the South, and many of the black student participants who acted with calm defiance in Nashville would later become prominent leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, including John Lewis, Marion Barry, Diane Nash, C.T. Vivian, Kwame Leo Lillard, Allen Carson, Jr., Etta Simpson Ray, Frederick Leonard, Alice Johnson, Sandra Brown, Barnard Lafayette, and James Bevel; and

WHEREAS, while the Nashville Sit-In Movement was notable for its emphasis on disciplined nonviolence, its demonstrators were met with bitter violence and unjust arrests, and, after eighty-one students were found guilty of disorderly conduct on February 29, 1960, they bravely refused to pay the fifty dollar fines, choosing instead to serve thirty-three days in jail and proclaiming, "We feel that if we pay these fines we would be contributing to and supporting the injustice and immoral practices that have been performed in the arrest and conviction of the defendants"; and

WHEREAS, on the pre-dawn morning of April 19, 1960, the home of NAACP Attorney Z. Alexander Lobby, legal counsel for the demonstrators, was destroyed by dynamite; and

WHEREAS, in response to this despicable display of racial violence, nearly 4,000 African-Americans marched on Nashville's City Hall, demanding justice and challenging Mayor Ben West to take a stand in what became known as "The Silent March"; the mayor finally conceded that segregation was morally wrong and that Nashville's lunch counters should in fact be desegregated; and

WHEREAS, the very next day, world renowned civil rights leader Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at Nashville's Fisk University, commending the students for their

courageous efforts and remarkable discipline and praising the Nashville Sit-In Movement as “the best organized and most disciplined in the Southland”; and

WHEREAS, on May 10, 1960, Nashville became the first major city to begin desegregating its public facilities, thereby striking an immutable blow against segregation and the perpetuation of racial inequality, inspiring freedom-loving people throughout the world, and fueling a new quest for justice among Americans so long aggrieved; and

WHEREAS, in celebration of this remarkable civil rights campaign, a number of events have been planned for 2010, including the Tennessee State Museum’s exhibition entitled, “We Shall Not be Moved,” the downtown Nashville Library’s photography exhibit entitled, “Visions & Voices: The Civil Rights Movement in Nashville and Tennessee,” the Nashville Conference on African-American History in conjunction with the Metropolitan Historical Commission, and a joint panel discussion conducted by the NAACP Nashville and the First Amendment Center; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly wholeheartedly embraces the noble ideals and worthy goals of the Nashville Sit-In Movement; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we recognize and commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Nashville Sit-In Movement and honor the seminal group of students and religious leaders who participated in the Movement for their unparalleled pursuit of justice and equality for all Tennesseans.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.